

**A RESOLUTION ON THE PROPOSALS FOR AN
ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC CALENDAR (03/4)**

WHEREAS, the University administration has requested a faculty response to the Report of the Study Group on An Alternative Academic Calendar at The George Washington University ("the Report"); and

WHEREAS, the response of the Faculty Senate is informed by the opinions of collective and individual faculty throughout the University; and

WHEREAS, The Faculty Senate believes that the proposed mandatory summer term would hinder the University's strategic objective to recruit and retain high quality undergraduates; and

WHEREAS, the ten-week instructional period of the proposed mandatory summer term would have the effect of mandating that courses which are not necessarily suited to a 10-week compression be taught in 10 weeks nevertheless, requiring faculty and students to rush academic delivery, coverage, and learning of material; and

WHEREAS, the proposed mandatory summer term would place a significant economic and logistical burden on the faculty and on the administration of departments, programs, and schools; and

WHEREAS, the Report's proposals appear inconsistent with the requirement by the U.S. Department of Education's 30-week residency requirement for juniors receiving financial aid and the Department of State's requirements for foreign student visas; and

WHEREAS, the Report does not speak to the important corollary issues involving the impact of these options upon graduate education, upon both faculty and student research, upon faculty governance, and upon service; and

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate views the proposed increase to four credit hour courses without a commensurate increase in contact time as inconsistent with the educational mission of the University; and

WHEREAS, adoption of the proposed "4x4" alternative would greatly diminish the opportunities for breadth and number of required and elective courses students can take; and

WHEREAS, the Report lacks any sort of Business Plan upon which the economic viability of the proposals could be discussed and evaluated; and

WHEREAS, the Report summarily dismisses potentially viable economic alternatives which would be far more consistent with the academic mission of the University than those alternatives upon which the Report focuses; and

WHEREAS, the four-credit course proposals addressed in the Report would be inconsistent with some state-mandated requirements for some schools, and the impact of the proposals addressed in the Report on other accrediting agencies is presently unknown and would require much further investigation; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE FACULTY SENATE OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

- (1) That the specific proposals contained in the Report are not in the best academic interests of the University; and
- (2) That these particular proposals do not carry the endorsement of the Faculty and must not be implemented; and
- (3) That no steps be taken to establish an implementation committee or commence implementation; and
- (4) That the Faculty stands ready and willing to develop with the administration other alternatives which meet specifically identified University needs while maintaining academic integrity; and
- (5) That any summer program remain voluntary for students and faculty; and
- (6) That in conformity with the faculty's Faculty Code mandated responsibilities, any further discussion of the topics of alternative academic calendar and/or summer session restructuring fully involve the Faculty, through its Faculty Senate Representatives, so as to remove the severe academic limitations and ambiguities of the set of proposals in the Report.

Educational Policy Committee
October 16, 2003

Adopted October 31, 2003

Report of the Joint Committee of Faculty and Students on the Alternative Academic Calendar

Sal Paratore, *Faculty Co-Chair*
Christian Berle, *Student Co-Chair*

Shaina Schallop, *Chair, Subcommittee on the Alternative Academic Calendar*

The academic mission of The George Washington University is to provide students and faculty with optimal opportunities for the creation, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge, and the pursuit of creative endeavors to meet the needs and enrich the experiences of a global society. As an academic institution, it is the responsibility of the faculty and the students to address the important issues that will greatly impact the University.

While the implementation of a mandatory summer session has its advantages, it is the recommendation of the JCFS subcommittee on the alternative academic calendar that more time be given to this issue before any plans of implementation are discussed and a final decision rendered. To institute such a program without faculty and student support or concrete, widely known, consistent plans with regard to the specific areas of academics and student life is not only undemocratic but also irresponsible. Without details to how the program will be enforced and student life improved (through public meetings, plans, budget specifications, etc.), the end of the input period on November 1 is found to be unacceptable by the committee. In short, we recommend that this issue undergo further investigation and study before any final plans for future implementation are decided.

The committee analyzed the report of the Study Group on the Alternative Academic Calendar, each of its appendices, and the supplemental report issued by the University Librarian. The committee greatly appreciates Dr. Charles Karelis' availability to meet with the committee, in addition to other members of the administration and the faculty who were responsive to questions issued by the committee and its members.

It is important to recognize, that the Joint Committee of Faculty and Students, which has been charged with reviewing all issues that pertain to faculty or students, seeks to fairly represent its constituencies. The Joint Committee chose to create a subcommittee to address the issue in further depth. The issues stated in this report are the collective views organized in representation of student and faculty opinion, and are not solely the direct opinions of the committee's members.

President Stephen J. Trachtenberg, in his address to the Faculty Assembly introducing the issue of an alternative calendar to be discussed, reminded students and faculty of the ancient Chinese proverb, "May you live in interesting times." With that truth undisputed, both inside and out of the academic world, it is important that especially in such 'interesting times,' a university should not rush to judgment. In addition reservations or

analysis of the issue only speaks of the concern of the students and faculty for the future of the University, and not just an opposition to change.

An alternative calendar has the possibility of greatly changing the face of the University, both inside and outside of the classroom. Such a change would make GW different from nearly every other college and university in the country. A difference could very well distinguish the University from other schools in its market, giving an added attraction to students who are considering matriculating at GW. However, such a distinction may make students hesitant to apply or transfer to GW, because of the alternative calendar.

The first issue, which the committee has chosen to address is the proposition that the University would require rising juniors to attend summer courses.

The report detailed a large degree of benefits the additional revenue, brought in by increased enrollment, would lead to support for academic programs. Though the University has not indicated where the increased revenues would be directed, President Trachtenberg and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Don Lehman, and the Study Group report have indicated that it would go at increasing the number of full time faculty, and strengthening numerous other academic programs at the University.

It is also important to note that the impression that has been given to the student body is that the change is based entirely upon the need for new revenue. President Trachtenberg is quoted on numerous occasions that the change is meant to pay for existing programs or demands for resources, such as the addition of a new science facility, or a home for the School of Public Health and Health Services. Further he notes that the University has difficulty raising funds for new programs, because of the conclusion of the capital campaign, and state of the economy.¹ Addressing the Board of Trustees President Trachtenberg stated, "You and I know we are talking about money. If we don't earn it, we can't spend it. If we don't earn it, we can't keep up the momentum." Board of Trustees Chairman Ambassador Charles Manatt echoed the statements of President Trachtenberg, stating, "We cannot continue to enlarge and improve the quality of the GW experience within the (financial) means currently available to us."²

Other potential benefits of the increased revenue could be lessened annual increases in tuition, and increased scholarships and financial aid. The report notes that increased revenue could reduce the gaps that exist between the ability of students' to pay GW tuition and the tuition itself. Cheryl Beil, Executive Director for Academic Planning and Assessment, noted that such 'gapping' leads students to work increased hours, and reduces the time available to focus on their studies. If increased revenue were directed at supporting financial aid, this would be a great benefit to students.

¹ Gordon, Julie, "Analyzing trimesters: Term would raise extra revenue," GW Hatchet, October 20, 2003

² Oinounou, Mosheh, "Trustees discuss boosting revenue," GW Hatchet, October 20, 2003

The report also notes that creating such a mandatory summer would allow the University to increase the number of courses offered to students. A thicker catalogue would mean more curricular options for students and more chances of finding courses that matched individual students' interests. Such a change would respond to students concerns and demands for more courses, and more sections of popular courses.

With a mandatory summer, the University could develop a 'signature program,' with an innovative and engaging academic curriculum, which could not be experienced at other times during the year, or at other institutions. Possibilities for such engagement include using the summer term for an 'introduction experience into the major, using it for intensive directed research, since laboratories would be in less demand, and using it for a mini-capstone course that would pull together the disparate elements of the student's general education in the lower division.'

At Dartmouth College, it is widely argued that requiring an entire class to spend a summer on camp helps foster class spirit, given that nearly all the students on campus will be from will be in the same class. However, unlike Dartmouth, which is a smaller institution in rural New Hampshire, GW is a major metropolitan university. Given the urban and fluid nature of the campus, a required summer session would not easily recreate the class spirit exhibited at Dartmouth.

Also, because of the change to the calendar, there would be a direct impact on extracurricular student life. The report details that at Dartmouth, student groups elect leadership at the beginning of each term, and this provides an opportunity for students to gain leadership opportunities earlier in their college career. For example many students would be able to become editors, organization presidents, and other leadership position. However, present conditions do allow for students to assume leadership positions in student organizations, and in student government. For example, the President of the Student Association, the Chairman of the College Republicans, the Executive Vice Chair of the Program Board, the Chairman Pro Tempore of the Student Association Senate, numerous committee chairs of the Program Board, members of the Colonial Cabinet, countless fraternity and sorority presidents, are all juniors. In addition, there are even numerous examples of students taking leadership opportunities in their sophomore year, as can be seen with six sophomores are members of the Student Association Senate.

However, this raises a number of issues when it comes to the continuity of student organizations, with such a high turnover of leadership. In addition, many students at GW have been able to assume positions in leadership prior to their senior year. For example, the Student Association President was elected as a rising junior, and numerous senators were elected as rising sophomores. It would also prove a financial burden as elections for the Program Board, Marvin Center Governing Board, and the Student Association cost over \$10,000 per election.

The addition of a mandatory summer session gives students the opportunity to use their 'off term' to travel, take a job or internship outside of the University. Possibilities include a political science student by spending the fall on a presidential campaign, or taking a job

as a staff assistant for a senator, congressman, or governor. Chemistry major could intern at any number of national laboratories throughout the country, and learn valuable insights into the world of medicine. An accounting major could intern with a CPA during the spring, when millions of Americans are filing their taxes. These are possibilities that would greatly add to the educational experiences of all students who would take advantage of them.

However, such opportunity already exists because of the current calendar. Many students choose to take time off from school to work on presidential, senatorial, and congressional campaigns. Students choose to volunteer at a high school or with a charity organization. Others spend that time traveling around the world or spending time at home with friends and family. These choices are feasible because students can make up the courses that they missed by taking classes during the summer, during the two existing summer terms. These actions would all be the choices of each student, and not the requirement mandated by the University. If there were a demand for that opportunity, the committee believes that such a desire would be evident by students taking time off, and enlisting in summer programs to make up credit to graduate on time.

President Trachtenberg has suggested that students could utilize their 'off-term' by studying abroad or attending classes at another university. However the report issued by the Study Group clearly states, "since 'taking off' means not studying for credit at GW or elsewhere, the term would be in addition to study abroad in most cases. In effect, rising juniors would be displacing a conventional summer vacation into a subsequent fall or spring."³ This presents a clear contradiction, if the University were to allow students to take credit at another institution during the term which they are 'taking off,' students would likely be more amenable to the proposed changes to the calendar. Additionally, the administration has pointed out that the fall is one of the busiest periods in retail; surely "something happens here" refers to interesting and unique experiences in Washington DC rather than folding sweaters at the GAP in the fall. It is important to note that while GW students do comprise a notable chunk of interns or part time help in the District, businesses cannot be expected to alter their calendar or intern programs to coincide with GW students who have a semester free.

As the University has taken numerous steps to increase its selectivity, and improve its placement in the rankings, it is difficult to understand why the University would desire to admit more students. It is especially concerning to admit students who fall well below the mean SAT, GPA, and extracurricular standards that the University currently holds for students applying to GW. Though previously scheduled, we have not yet had the ability to converse with a member from the office of admissions, which we also find particularly troubling. The committee is concerned that admissions standards will be lowered in order to gain the additional one thousand students, per class, to pay for the change in the calendar.

The report of the Study Group indicated that the Office of Undergraduate Admissions would accept more students from 'the next slice down,' which gave the committee the

³ Ibid, p. 7

impression that these students would not meet the current high standards set by the University for matriculated students. The report also stated that more students could 'be recruited with less financial aid than students in the top slice.' This statement leads the committee to believe that the additional thousand students would not be admitted on the merits of their addition to University, instead that they would be admitted almost entirely on their ability to afford GW tuition. Such a decision in the admissions process does not seem to be in congruence with the academic mission of the University, and the desire to educate students.

The mandatory summer session could create a scenario by which students would be required to be on campus for five semesters in a row, without a significant vacation. This could conceivably develop a high burnout rate for students, which would be detrimental to the academic experience of students.

The summer session is specifically required for 'rising juniors;' however, it does not clarify whether that status is determined by academic credit or by class standing. Many students matriculate at GW with college credit prior to the beginning of their freshman year. Some students come in with between fifteen and thirty credits, and, to be technical, the summer before their junior year would be at the end of their freshman year. The requirement that those students attend a summer session detracts from their connection to their matriculated class. In addition, on occasions students enter school with more than sixty credits, in fact making the summer prior to their junior year, the summer before they even start classes. In this situation, it is unlikely that the University would have any ability to require students to enter this summer session.

There are also the issues of students who fall behind by a semester or more because of a personal illness, family issues, and many other reasons. Their class standing, even if their plans are to graduate in four years, would place them in terms of credit, in a different class than that which they matriculated. This would play a large role to reduce the class spirit that the plan proposes to create.

Lastly, it is important to address the learning that goes on outside the classroom. The bonds formed by students both within their class and with students in actual classes span farther than freshmen, sophomore, junior or senior distinctions. Implementing a mandatory summer session destroys the bonds formed during the year through Greek mixers, SA senate campaigns, and even studying for midterms late at night in the Gelman library study rooms. Other options successful at schools like the University of Maryland at College Park include a winter session during the holiday season, where students have the option of a four-week session to catch up on a class or two. It is wildly popular and many students take advantage of their proximity to DC to take only three or four classes a semester and intern in the District with the intent to take a fifth in that winter session. We feel that even an optional summer session at a lower tuition rate could be a viable solution to need to increase revenue at GW. Furthermore, the idea of an optional term eliminates special treatment for athletes; already privy to early registration, they would have the option of skipping the mandatory summer entirely. Would this affect other "priority" student groups like honors students or even pep band members? Would the

entire University try out to be a member of the pep band or an athletics team to be excused from the summer session? We feel this is a slippery slope; what about the VIP or Curious Minds Rock counselors who work all summer? There would be fewer juniors in these programs, possibly affecting the quality of staff in the admissions office over the summer. CI group leaders would not be juniors if the mandatory summer were instituted, leaving out an incredible group of leaders. On such a slippery slope, where do we draw the line?

Though it is important to recognize that many concerns could be ironed out during the possible 'implementation process,' it is critical to understand that the levels of energy and resources required for such a change. The Strategic Plan for Academic Excellence outlines a number of ways where the University is planning on improving the academic experience of students, while strengthening GW's status as a research institution. This is happening while the office of the Executive Vice President and Treasurer and the division of Student and Academic Support Services are launching efforts to improve customer service across the University. The committee is concerned that many positive and groundbreaking initiatives such as the degree audit program and the proposed merger of the Student Association's Academic Update with the departmental course evaluations, and numerous other programs would be abandoned because of the focus that would be needed to implement the new calendar.

It is important to address the impact of a mandatory summer on student services, which are already a complaint amongst students. The Gelman Library System issued a supplemental report raising a number of concerns for all students and faculty. The resources are already taxed heavily because of the high rate of inflation in the cost of books and collections. The library operates on the condition of restricting time off for significant vacation time to the summer months, because of the lessened demand on the libraries. Most of the classes taken during this period would be upper level courses, which require more outside research that would lead to increased use of the library. It has been proposed that the Gelman Library would need an additional \$550,000 just to increase the size of their staff and operations to deal with the increased demand. Also, the committee feels strongly that that these increases in funds not count against any increase that they receive to adjust to inflationary costs. Also, the collection size and services should increase due to the increased size of the undergraduate population.

It is also critical to keep the Career Center open during the summer, especially because the plan suggests that students take jobs or internships during their 'off-term.' Also, the signature program that the University hopes to create does underline an increased focus on helping students find strong internships, and the Career Center will be in much higher demand to accommodate such expectations. Also, the Career Center would have to expand its focus to help students obtain internships outside of Washington, DC, as many of the students will not be living in the District during their off term.

The required 'off-term' would greatly displace the time where many students are preparing for their post-graduate work. Numerous students spend their junior year applying for Fulbright, Marshall, Rhodes, and Truman Scholarships, among many others.

Students take and prepare for LSATs, GREs, MCATs, GMATs and other entrance exams during the time, which they could be required to 'take off.' The separation away from the University and its many services, such as the Counseling Center, University Honors Program and Office of National Fellowship Competitions would be detrimental to their ambitions for post-graduate work.

It is also important to note that another option investigated by the committee was a four by four system with a mandatory summer session. While the four by four could be a great addition to GW, there are several concerns we would like to note that point to the need for further investigation. Primarily, a four by four system would theoretically allow students to take a more in-depth look at a subject by taking only four as opposed to five classes each semester. However, the original report does not specify any additional class time granted to students; consequently, what will comprise the extra credit (3 to 4 credit classes)? We feel that this increase in class time must be substantial to justify the addition of an extra credit hour per class. This extra time would enable both the professor and the student to spend more time on topics they enjoy and explore the subject matter in greater detail.

Lastly, the committee is particularly concerned with the reduction in course offerings by a possible ten percent with the institution of a four by four grid. This would cause major reorganization on the part of the faculty; for example, many professors have pointed out that it is extremely difficult to remove course A and distribute appropriate topics to courses B and C. This change would require rigorous activity on the part of each individual department, a change that should be thought through before implemented. However, one aspect of the four by four system that we do like is the increased flexibility that comes with taking fewer courses. Students could have the option of working part time or even interning in the time that they would normally be in their fifth class. Though we are intrigued by this system, we feel it would be most beneficial without the institution of the mandatory summer session. Unfortunately, this option presented the lowest increase in expected revenue according to the excel models.

Given the previously stated reasons, The Joint Committee of Faculty and Students recommends that the ideas for the implementation of a mandatory summer session and the four by four academic credit system, be placed under further review. While both recommendations have their advantages, the possible shortcomings of the programs must be addressed and presented to the student body and faculty before any such proposals are implemented. Therefore the committee cannot recommend an adoption of the alternative calendar proposals.